

3. It won't be like this always: God won't withhold judgment forever

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[0 : 00] This is the third study in our series asking the question why the world is as it is. And we're finding the answers in Genesis and today in particular we're seeing how that's traced through the rest of the Bible.

But we're going to read again the passage we read last week, the story of the Tower of Babel, or perhaps better, the city of Babel. And just listen to these words from the mists of time, but how they describe our world today.

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly.

And they had brick for stone and bitumen for mortar. And they said, come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens.

And let us make a name for ourselves, lest we'd be dispersed over the face of the whole earth. And you'll remember if you've read Genesis 9 and 10 that that is in fact what God had told people to do.

[1 : 14] Disperse yourselves across the earth, fill the world, subdue it, and be blessed. But no, we don't want to do that. We'll build a city here. And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the children of man had built.

And the Lord said, behold, they are one people. And they have all one language. And this is only the beginning of what they'll do. And nothing they propose to do now will be impossible for them.

Come, let us go down. And there confuse their language so that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth.

And they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, which sounds like confused. Because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth.

And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth. Well let's pray, shall we, before we look at God's word. Lord, we look at this world.

[2 : 21] The world that we see around about us today. The world we read of in your word. And we see a world broken. A world full of want and wars.

Despite the ancient dream of peace and security. Of certainty and of blessing. Which all of us know that we long for. Which all of us deep down sense that this world ought to be.

Despite that, this is not what we see. We see a world in rebellion against you. A world that has shut you out. A society that desires to build itself and exalt itself.

Without any thought of you in its mind. Lord, we know this is our world. And so as we sang in the hymn, we cry to you for a better world.

And we praise you that your word promises that to us. And tells us that you have not given up on our world. But that you have, by your great purposes of grace.

[3 : 32] A plan of great redemption. That this world will once again be as you desire it to be. And all evil will be banished from it.

Help us, Lord, to see your plan and your purposes. And may your light break into our darkness. That we might see the world around us with your eyes.

And therefore have hope. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we've been asking this question this month as we're studying the scriptures.

And particularly this book of Genesis. Why is the world as it is? That's a question that people are often asking themselves. We do ask that question, don't we?

Even though a lot of the time it may seem as though there's no clear answer. Or certainly no sure place to look. Why the paradox of this world?

[4 : 33] A world full of beauty and joy and love. But at the same time we can't deny a world of ugliness. A world of sorrow.

A world of hatred. Why do we live in a world of progress? And of the prowess of humankind. Of achievement. And yet at the same time we live in a world of shame.

A world of regression. We have to acknowledge the bestial treatment of human beings. By other humans. It's all too evident.

Why is that? Well, the Bible offers its explanation of this reality. And that's what we're thinking about. And we're just asking that you take it seriously. And listen to what the Bible says.

And how the Bible seeks to explain this. And match that up with how you seek to explain. Give it a fair hearing. Well, here we are in the book of Genesis. The beginning of the Bible.

[5 : 31] Actually, we've seen already. It's in fact a prologue. And then ten books of Genesis.

Chapter one tells us about the beginning. The creation of the world. And then we have all these different books of beginnings.

And the bit that we read there comes at the end of the fourth book of Genesis. The fifth book begins at chapter 11, verse 10. Do you see? These are the generations. Oh, this is the Genesis of Shem.

And from there, the descendants of Shem. The whole story of the Bible narrows right down. It narrows right down to one family. It becomes the story of the family of Abraham.

That's what you know. Abraham was the ancestor of Israel. Just look down to chapter 11, verse 26.

When Terah had lived 70 years, he fathered Abraham, Nahor, and Haran.

Well, he's called Abraham back then. He got his name lengthened a bit later, but that's not for today. From then on, the whole story narrows down to a story about the family of Abraham.

[6 : 29] But, the whole point of the first ten chapters of Genesis is to remind us that God's story is not the exclusive preserve of just that one family.

God's not just interested in Israel. No. From the beginning, the whole world, the whole of creation, has been God's concern. And, in another way, if I can put it like this, the whole world remains God's problem.

Or, rather, the whole world has got a problem, a problem with God. And, that's why the world is as it is today. The whole world, as we know, it is one of paradox.

We've said that. It is a world of extraordinary wonder. And, yet, it is also a world of tragic disaster.

We can't deny that. It's all around us. And, the Bible says that that is because the whole world is both under God's blessing, on the one hand, but also under his curse, under his judgment.

Now, we've already seen in our first couple of studies that God's judgments in history have been, in fact, merciful judgments. In themselves, they protect the world for God's blessing.

[7 : 54] God's judgments in history have taken place so that the world is not destroyed by humankind, so that God's plan and purpose for the world can, in fact, go on. But, the world is as it is today because we live in a world under the merciful judgment of God.

And, that's the Bible's testimony. But, and this is today's point, the Bible is equally clear. The world will not remain that way forever.

God will not hold ultimate judgment forever. God's merciful judgments in the world to preserve the world of mankind will, one day, come to an end.

And then, there will be a final judgment. A final judgment on the world to end the world. And, that's the clear teaching of the Bible.

And, that's where the story that begins, here in Genesis, is going to end. At the end of the whole story of the Bible. It's the story of the city of man.

[9 : 03] That's, that's what Babel represents. It's the story of mankind in unbridled defiance against God. But, that is a situation that cannot last forever.

That's what the Bible says. In the end, every such pretension, just like the Tower of Babel, the city of Babel, every Babylon, or Babel, will be destroyed.

The whole world of man in opposition to God, cannot be allowed to last. There will be an end. And then, there will be, in its place, something very, very different.

Not the city of man, but the city of God. So, I just want to think about these two things today. First of all, let's think back for a minute to what we've seen in Genesis about God's merciful judgments in history.

And then, we must think about the ultimate judgment. Genesis 1, you remember, began the story of creation. And, God laid out his purpose for mankind in Genesis 1, verse 28.

[10:09] Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, have dominion. It's a great command of blessing. That's why the world has been made, says God. But then, of course, comes the rebellion of humankind.

We'll do it our way. We won't have it God's way. And God must judge. He must banish mankind from his presence. That's the story of Adam and Eve being sent out of the Garden of Eden and a flaming sword guarding the way back.

God can't allow rebels and rivals to remain in his presence and remain having the privileges that he had given man in the beginning. No. He would seek to usurp and rival God himself.

After man's rebellion, we see in these early chapters of Genesis the sin just multiplying and multiplying. Cain murders his brother Abel. Things get worse and worse.

And yet, God hasn't totally abandoned his world. We read at the end of Genesis chapter 4, people began to call on the name of the Lord. God has not totally absented himself from his world.

[11:17] And yet, the sin becomes so prolific. Genesis chapter 6 tells us that God saw that in man every inclination of his heart was only evil all of the time.

Things got so bad that God once again had to judge the whole world. That's the story of a flood destroying everything in a disaster. But still, God has not totally abandoned his world.

It begins again, a fresh start with the whole family of Noah. And once again, God repeats his command of blessing. Go and fill the earth. Multiply. Be blessed.

But still, human beings rebel against God. We'll do it our way. So here we come to the story of the plains of Shinar.

People like Nimrod, whose name means we shall rebel. And he builds a city. He builds cities. Cities of man. Societies without God. Societies that are against God.

[12:18] That's what Genesis 11 verse 4 is telling us, isn't it? Just look at it. They say, we'll make a name for ourselves. We won't be dispersed all over the earth as God wants us.

We'll be secure here. We'll stay here. We'll build a tower to the heavens and become like gods ourselves. Just the same old song in a different key. And again, God must judge.

Because otherwise, as verse 6 says, anything they seek to do will not be impossible for them. Just imagine humankind, all the dictators, all the tyrants, all the terrorists, all the criminals.

Just imagine if they could all be together in one place, working in harmony. Just think what would happen to this world. But God says, I can't allow that to happen. So again, he judges.

He scatters humanity. He puts them at odds with one another. He gives them confused languages. He gives them clashing cultures. Well, we just need to read our newspapers today to see that's true, don't we? Clashing cultures all over the place.

[13:24] And that's our world. And it's because, the Bible tells us, it's a world under God's sovereign blessing. And yet, he hasn't totally destroyed it.

But he has judged it many times, in mercy, to prevent the world from destroying itself. His judgments are merciful, to preserve the world.

And yet, the Bible is just as clear that things won't be like that forever. Christian faith doesn't speak about a samsaric round, like the Hindus believe in, where things just go round, round and round, and round, in circles of reincarnation, forever and ever.

No. The Bible says, there will come a time, there will come a time, when God's merciful judgment, to preserve the world, gives way at last, to something else.

To God's ultimate judgment, to end the world. The Bible is clear, the city of man cannot triumph forever. There will be an end, there will be a decisive end, to Babel, or Babylon, to the world at odds with God, to the city of man, there will be an end.

[14:41] And I want to just show you today, a little thread, through the whole Bible, because this is a thread, that goes right through, the whole of scripture. Just to see a little bit, of how that story unfolds.

Because you see, in the Bible, from Genesis 11 onwards, from Babel, or from Babylon, as it becomes more commonly known later on, that city comes to typify, to epitomize, the whole world, at odds with God.

If you read through the story of Israel, you'll find that the literal history of Babylon, the nation, the empire, and its opposition to Israel, typifies, something far greater.

The prophets, take up, and use, Babylon, as, signifying, everything that is against God, in the world. Everything that is, expressive of man's rebellion, against God.

Just turn with me to Isaiah. If you turn over, it's page 578, Isaiah chapter 14. Here Isaiah is prophesying, in the 8th century BC, thousands and thousands of years, after Genesis.

[15:52] 800 years, before the coming of Jesus. If you turn back a page to Isaiah 13, you'll see, the heading is, The Judgment of Babylon. Babylon. And it's a whole, diatribe of God's judgments, against that land.

And at this time, the Babylonian Empire, is a mighty power. But you'll see, that when, the prophet Isaiah, here in chapter 14, is talking about Babylon, he's talking about something, much, much bigger, than just, the historical empire, of Babylon.

Babylon. He's actually talking about, the ultimate salvation of God, for his world, and, the ultimate judgment of God, for his world. Just look at, chapter 14, verse 12.

Speaking about Babylon. How you were fallen from heaven, O day star, son of the dawn. How you were cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low.

You said in your heart, I will ascend to heaven, above the stars of God. See, just like the tower. I will set my throne on high, I will sit on the mount of assembly, in the far reaches of the north.

[17:02] I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will make myself, like the most high.

Society, society, seeking to be its own God. But, you're brought down to Sheol, to hell, to the far reaches of the pit.

You see, he's looking forward, to an ultimate judgment. Everything that's anti-God, everything that, is personified, in the whole story of Babel, and Babylon, will be destroyed.

Just look at the judgment. that's promised in verse 22. I will rise up against them, declares the Lord of hosts, and will cut off from Babylon, a name, and remnant, descendants, and posterity, says the Lord.

And I will make it a possession, of the hedgehog, and the pools of water. I will sweep it, with a broom of destruction, says the Lord, of hosts. You see, that's not a, a merciful judgment anymore, is it?

That's not a scattering, that is, destruction. And do you see the irony, in verse 22? Everything that mankind, is seeking for, everything that the builders, of Babel, were looking for, a name, descendants, posterity, we'll build these ourselves, they say, without God.

[18:23] And God says, that'll all be swept away, with the broom of destruction. Just in case, you miss it, look down to verse 26, it just makes it, exceptionally clear here, that when, the prophet is talking, about God's judgment, on these great cities, he's not just meaning, these particular cities, he's meaning the whole world.

This is the purpose, that is purposed, concerning the whole earth. And this is the hand, that is stretched out, over all the nations. And you'll find that, again and again, in the prophets, of the Old Testament.

But you know, that's the story, not just of the Old Testament, it's the story, of the whole Bible. When we come to the New Testament, when we come to the very, end of the Bible, in the book of Revelation, we find exactly, the same thing.

Babylon, represents, in John's vision, everything that is, against God. The whole of human society, in rebellion, against God. John sees, in vivid, visionary terms, the same judgment, that the prophets, are speaking about.

Just listen, to Revelation, chapter 14, and verse 8. You can look it up, if you want, but don't worry. You see there, he's saying, that it's Babylon, that has made all nations, drink the maddening wine, of her sexual immorality.

[19:47] And the whole New Testament, you see, the whole New Testament, speaks about, a fearful climax, of evil, where mankind, expresses his rebellion, against God, before, an ultimate judgment.

When God's restraining hand, and his merciful judgments, are lifted, and a last, great revolt, of mankind, against God, is unleashed. Paul speaks about that, in 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2.

But in the book of Revelation, we've got it in, vivid, painted pictures. So just listen to Revelation, chapter 20, for example. Verse 7.

Satan will be released, from his prison, and will come out, to deceive the nations, that are the four corners, of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them, for battle. Their number, is like the sand, of

the sea.

And they marched up, over the broad plain, of the earth, and surrounded, the camp of the saints, and the beloved city. See, that's, a vivid picture, of all the great cities, the peoples of the earth, united, against, the God of heaven.

[20 : 54] It's like Babel, revisited. It's a cosmic picture, of mankind's revolt, and rebellion, against God. But do you see, what happens? Verse 9. But fire came down, from heaven, and consumed them.

See, this is a final judgment. It's the end. It's a just, and a righteous judgment, a retribution, an eternal judgment. Just read on. Fire came down, from heaven, and consumed them.

And the devil, who had deceived them, was thrown, into the lake of fire, and sulfur, where the beast, and the false prophet, were. And they will be, tormented, day and night, forever.

You see, all the united evil, all the opposition, against the true God, of heaven, and the great deceiver, who's behind it all, the devil himself, all will ultimately, be judged, forever, and ever.

That's the message, of the Bible. Here it is, in a vivid picture, with all these strange visions. But the message is very clear, isn't it? That's the end, forever. It's the end of Babylon.

[22 : 02] It's the end, of the city of man. Just turn back a page, to Revelation chapter 18. You'll see, it's headed, the fall of Babylon. The whole chapter, speaks about that great end.

Fallen, verse 2. Fallen is Babylon the great. She's become a dwelling place, for demons. A haunt, for every unclean spirit. A haunt, for every unclean bird. A haunt, for every unclean, and detestable beast.

For all nations, have drunk the wine, of the passion, of her sexual immorality. The kings of the earth, have committed immorality, with her. The merchants, of the earth, have grown rich, from the power, of her luxurious, living.

It's the fall of Babylon. Look what happens. Come out from her, my people, lest you take part, in her sins. Lest you share, in her plagues.

For her sins, are heaped high as heaven. And God has remembered, her iniquities. Verse 8. For this reason, her plagues, will come in a single day. Death, and mourning, and famine.

[23 : 04] And she will be burned up, with fire. For mighty, is the Lord God, who has judged her. You see, the extraordinary thing is here, if you look down, to verse 16, is that there's no repentance, by the world.

In fact, the world is, in sorrow, for the removal, of Babylon. Alas, verse 16, for the great city, that was clothed, in fine linen, in purple, and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls. For in a single hour, all this wealth, has been laid waste. And all shipmasters, and seafaring men, sailors, and all who trade in on the sea, stood far off, and cried out, as they saw the smoke, of her burning.

What city was like, this great city? And they threw dust, on their heads, as they wept, and mourned, crying out, Alas, alas, for the great city, where all who had ships, at sea, grew rich by her wealth. For in a single hour, she's been laid waste. See, the city of man, even confronted, with the glory, and the judgment of God, will not repent.

[24 : 13] Just mourns, the loss, of all that they rejoiced in, that was against God. But verse 20 says, that all of heaven, and God's city, will rejoice.

Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints, and apostles, and prophets, for God has given judgment, for you, against her. This is the most vivid, of pictures, of the story, of the whole Bible.

It's in the teaching, of Jesus, in the teaching, of the apostles. It's in every page, of scripture. The world, as the city of man, and rebellion against God, will not remain, as it is, forever.

The world hates God, it scorns God, does not acknowledge God. And God, mercifully, in his judgment, is allowing the world, to continue, so that his purpose, of salvation, can be made known, in the world.

But there will come, an end, to the city of man. Look at verse 21. Then a mighty angel, took up a stone, like a great millstone, and threw it, into the sea, saying, so will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down, with violence, and will be found, no more.

[25 : 34] And the sound of harpists, and musicians, of flute players, and trumpeters, will be heard, and you know more. Do you see, all the beautiful things, of this world, will be taken away, along with all the rest, because, verse 24, do you see, in her was found, the blood of prophets, and of saints, of all who have been slain, on earth.

A world that shows, its hatred of God, by its hatred, of those who speak, for God. But you know, heaven rejoices, because, the wickedness, of the world, will be no more.

A world that's full, of hatred, and mockery, it will, at last, be judged. The world of tyrants, of exploiters, of murderers, and rapists, and thieves, of hard-hearted men, who exploit women, and children.

The world of injustice, of squalor, of suffering, of pride. It will be no more. It will end in judgment. The city of man, will, at last, be destroyed.

And all the heavens, and all those, who have sought the Lord, will cry hallelujah, because the heavens, will know, that at last, justice has been done. It's not a wrong destruction.

[26 : 53] It's a just one. At last, evil will have been avenged. At last, the world will have seen, that God is just, and he is powerful, to avenge evil.

And heaven will cry hallelujah. Do you know, Handel's hallelujah chorus? Well, this is it. Revelation chapter 19, verse 1. Can you see? Hallelujah.

A great multitude, in heaven, crying out, hallelujah, salvation, and glory, and power, belong to our God, for his judgments, are true, and just. For he has judged, the great prostitute, who corrupted the earth, with her immorality, and has avenged, on her, the blood of his servants.

Do you long for a world, that's, finally rid of evil, and injustice, and wickedness? Well, the Bible says, the world will not be, as it is, just now, won't be like that forever.

God will not, withhold ultimate judgment, forever. It's a solemn thought, isn't it? But we do cry out, for justice. We do cry out, for justice to be done.

[28 : 15] And that is, the undeniable teaching, of scripture, all the way through, from beginning to end. We've seen that. It's not the whole story, though. It's not the whole story, because, with God, judgment is never the last word, it's never the greatest word.

To hear the rest of that, you'll have to come back next week. But for today, I want you to think about this. Whose side, do you, want to be on, when God's merciful judgments, on this world, to preserve it, become at last, his ultimate judgment, to destroy it?

Which city, do you want to be in, on that day? The city of man, or the city of God? Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, your word is, solemn and hard for us, because we know, that, we stand, with all humanity, in falling so far short, of all that you've desired, and frankly, having rebelled against you, in so many ways.

We praise you, that your judgments, on this world, have thus far, been merciful, that you've preserved, the nations, and tribes, and languages, and peoples, that they might hear, of your message, of salvation, and glory, that has come to us, in Jesus Christ, once and for all.

[29 : 53] we pray, Lord, that you would fill us, with the urgency, of this message, to make this world, here, before that last, great day, when all will be revealed, and both your glory, and your judgments, will be final, in this world of ours.

May we be fine, we pray, in your city, and under the shadow, of your wing, of protection, for we ask it, in Jesus name, Amen.